Charles A. Beard and the Constitution: A Critical Review of Forrest McDonald's *We the People*

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With a Rebuttal by Forrest McDonald†

IT is a little strange that, when dozens of monographs during two-score years have profitably used Beard's interpretation of the Constitution, an attempt utterly to refute him has aroused scarcely a whimper of protest. Nobody would insist that Beard's thesis be accepted in its entirety, but his fundamental idea—that the Constitution reflected the economic interests of the large property holders who wrote it—has survived much research, and any book which challenges it ought to be examined with a cautious and a skeptical eye. If Forrest McDonald's *We the People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago, 1958), is so scrutinized, it will be found that Beard has survived the attack. Since a complete criticism would require a volume of equal length, this discussion will review only a few of the most important aspects.[1]

Beard's work was an early attempt to test the hypothesis "that economic elements are the chief factors in the development of political institutions."[2] He therefore assembled data concerning the real and personal property owned by those who wrote the Constitution and those

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[1] This essay is based upon material gathered for a study of post-Revolutionary politics. The objective is not to defend Beard *in toto,* for much that he wrote has been proved erroneous, nor is it to present an alternative hypothesis, but to examine critically this particular attack upon Beard's thesis and thereby to clear the way for future interpretations.

[2] *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York, 1913), p. 6.

who favored its ratification. Since, as he wrote, a complete survey "would entail an enormous labor," Beard relied chiefly on secondary accounts and published documents, except that he did undertake to identify the holders of the Federal debt. In addition, he discussed the political ideas of the members of the Federal Convention insofar as these related to his general purpose. This chapter is not discussed by McDonald. Beard found that most of the members of the Convention were lawyers, that they came from towns or regions near the coast where public securities were concentrated, that they were not farmers, and that they would be economically benefited by ratification because they possessed public securities, land held for speculation, money at interest, slaves, or property in commerce, manufacturing, and shipping. The same observations applied to the Federal members of the various state ratifying conventions. In general, the division on this issue "was between substantial personalty interests on the one hand and the small farming and debtor interests on the other."

McDonald set himself the task of testing Beard's conclusions. In doing so he made far greater use of primary materials and has substantially increased our knowledge, especially concerning the economic interests of the men involved. It is this contribution which immediately impresses the reader and has led to the general praise which the book has hitherto received. Nevertheless the research is far from complete. The facts cited are those which tend to refute Beard, while those which would support his views are often omitted; and the interpretation of the facts is likewise open to dispute.

The first part of the book attempts to prove that the Federal Convention, far from reflecting exclusively the ideas of certain well-to-do economic groups, was a truly representative body. McDonald seeks first to show that the delegates came from most of the major geographical areas; second, that they reflected all "shades of political opinion"; and third, that they themselves were of diverse economic interests, often in debt, less rich than Beard had suggested, and less influenced by ownership of public securities.

The first contention is "proved" by defining geographical areas in a way which achieves the desired result and by counting as present at the Convention anyone who was chosen as a delegate even when he did not attend. This faulty methodology may be illustrated by the case of Massachusetts. On the basis of physical location one might expect that the major areas would be described as (1) the maritime coast and its

immediate hinterland, (2) Maine, and (3) the agricultural, upland interior, with perhaps (4) the Connecticut Valley towns distinguished as a fourth section. Such a division would reflect political and economic realities, for the seacoast towns were in fact usually opposed to those of the interior, while the lower Connecticut Valley usually supported the east and Maine went its own way. If this were done, then of the four delegates who attended, three came from the east and one from the Valley, leaving most of the state, including Maine and all of the interior, unrepresented. However, McDonald divides the coastal towns into four separate areas in such a way that all but one of them were represented; counts Rufus King as doubling for Maine as well as Newburyport, although King no longer lived in either place (being in fact a resident of New York) and had left Maine when he was twelve; considers that a group of interior towns connected with Boston were present through Francis Dana, although Dana did not attend the Convention; and concludes that six out of the nine areas into which he divides the state were represented at Philadelphia. In this manner the fundamental fact, which Beard recognized, is concealed, namely, that the commercial east coast was represented and the agrarian west was not. In like fashion he says that three out of four New Hampshire regions were represented, although the only two delegates who attended were from Portsmouth and Exeter, both within ten miles of the coast!

In Virginia as in Massachusetts, McDonald divides the Tidewater eastern part of the state into four separate areas, all represented; in addition the "Upper James" is counted present through Edmund Randolph who lived in Richmond, a fall-line town; and the rest of the interior is also considered to be present through Patrick Henry, who did not attend. McDonald can then cheerfully concede that the three sections west of the Blue Ridge were not represented, for he has discovered a majority of six out of nine. It can be argued with equal if not superior evidence that in truth all of Virginia's delegates to the Convention represented only one section: the Tidewater, or perhaps more accurately the eastern river valley area, leaving four sections to be counted as not present.[3]

McDonald's proof that "all shades of political opinion" were present rests upon his division of the country into "factions," which are supposed to include all political groupings. He then finds that most of the major

[3] Jackson T. Main, "Sections and Politics in Virginia, 1781-1787," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XII (1955), 96-112.

factions were represented. The argument depends, of course, upon whether the idea of "factions" adequately describes post-Revolutionary politics, and whether his particular identification of factions is valid. His conclusions therefore follow only if his definitions be accepted and if in addition it is granted that all those chosen as delegates should be counted even though they rejected the election. Massachusetts may again serve as an illustration. McDonald finds two major factions, led by John Hancock and James Bowdoin, and several minor ones headed by Samuel Adams, Theodore Sedgwick, Benjamin Lincoln, Benjamin Austin, and the Cushing family. Since both of the major factions were represented, he declares his point proved. But Massachusetts politics cannot be explained in terms of the personal leadership of individuals, of whom all but one lived near the coast, and that one (Sedgwick) a supporter of the conservative, commercial Bowdoin group. What about the vast majority of small interior towns? Surely a delegation which contained not a single man to express the views of small farmers—not a Shaysite or Shaysite sympathizer—did not reflect all of the various political opinions, but fundamentally only one. Similarly in Virginia, McDonald declares that "all four major and three independent factions were represented." But R. H. Lee and Henry did not attend, so that even accepting his definition of factions the true figure is two out of four major groups. Moreover, once again there was not a single delegate who spoke for the small farmers. In state after state the only "factions" represented were those of the mercantile, large landholding, well-to-do easterners, and it certainly is not true that the Convention represented all shades of political opinion. Once again Beard's analysis is the more nearly correct one.

The attempt to refute Beard's views concerning the property interests of the delegates is equally open to question, even though McDonald has gathered much additional data. The refutation is attempted by placing the emphasis upon those facts which depreciate the property held and by continually minimizing the delegates' wealth. Now every historian is required to select such facts as he believes significant and to arrange them in such a way as to convey a meaning: to interpret. Yet it is not always easy for the reader to remember that he is being presented an interpretation rather than an exact re-creation of reality. It will be instructive to compare, in a few cases, the accounts given by Beard and McDonald. The latter emphasizes that Robert Morris was heavily in debt and died bankrupt; Beard barely mentions this and concentrates upon describing his

great wealth in 1787. Beard stresses James Wilson's large estate, McDonald his debts and ultimate poverty. To McDonald, Hamilton was "perpetually in debt"; to Beard, he is the principal spokesman for the rich, who "lived well, and had a large income." Madison is depicted by McDonald as the owner of "560 ill-kept acres," by Beard as the son of a wealthy planter, relieved thereby from the necessity of earning a living (actually the Madison estate included 5,748 acres and 99 slaves). Richard Bassett appears in *We the People* as a man of moderate means who lived "in comfort"; in Beard he is one of the wealthy men of the state who "entertained lavishly." In a number of other instances the two accounts differ, sometimes radically.[4]

Throughout *We the People,* men of means are made to appear quite the opposite. Hamilton, Robert Morris and Wilson were not the only ones to die in debt; so also did Nathaniel Gorham, who in 1787—the date that matters—was one of the country's wealthiest men. We read that Pierce Butler, who owned 143 slaves, was "in rather desperate circumstances." William Houstoun, "the richest member of the Georgia delegation," could scarcely support himself, the implication being that the rest of the delegates from that state must have been truly impoverished; yet in truth Houstoun was one of the wealthy planter aristocracy with extensive lands. Gouverneur Morris's family estate is called "magnificent" when he fails to inherit it, but in the next paragraph, having passed into Morris's hands, it becomes "debt-laden." Jared Ingersoll, we read, had in 1787 "besides a wealthy father-in-law, a moderately successful practice, a fourth interest in a 30-ton sloop in the coasting trade, *and little else*" (italics mine). Edmund Randolph was in "great need," "beset with economic difficulties," impoverished it seems by thousands of acres and over a hundred slaves. Indeed to McDonald the rich man had less wealth than the poor, for we learn that John Rutledge's 243 slaves "were apparently more of a burden than an asset." When a man's basic wealth enabled him to borrow money in a time of great currency shortage, this is interpreted as a sign of poverty. Washington becomes "land- and slave-poor," a debtor, who borrowed £10,000 to cover expenses when he went to New York as President. McDonald lists thirteen members who were "debtors for significant amounts" and whose condition "ranged from acute

[4] See the treatment of Ellsworth, Ingersoll, King, and Wythe. Incidentally the last had, in addition to the property assigned to him by McDonald, 800 acres and 28 slaves in Elizabeth City County.

embarrassment to desperation and outright bankruptcy," including such impecunious figures as Rutledge, Robert Morris, James Wilson, Washington, Madison, Randolph, Butler, Houstoun, and both Pickneys.

This is absurd. If the reader will take the trouble to examine the facts which McDonald himself provides, the true situation will become apparent. The fact is that over two dozen of the sixty-five elected delegates, and more than half of those who signed the Constitution, were rich, and others were well-to-do. Not more than nine—less than one-seventh of the elected delegates—were of only modest means. Almost all of the delegates, moreover, were merchants, large landholders, or lawyers representing these groups, comprising precisely what Beard said they were: a "consolidated economic group."

McDonald also attempts to disprove the influence of public securities upon the Founders. The real question, it might be urged, is not whether a member of the Convention held securities, but the distribution of these in the country at large and the extent to which delegates reflected the desires of security holders.[5] However, since Beard did not do this, McDonald is justified in restricting his inquiries to the holdings of the delegates. In doing so he emphasizes that few of them held large amounts, and he tries, by gratuitous remarks, to disparage the importance of the profit received. Nicholas Gilman made $500 which is "roughly $10 per month from 1787 to 1791." Rufus King made "only" about $1,300 in four years. Thomas Fitzsimons retained "only" $2,668.10 worth. Oliver Ellsworth's profit of $3,240 "would hardly seem large enough to write a Constitution to protect," and McDonald's concession that in Ellsworth's case the motive probably did exist merely emphasizes the impression he conveys that in all other cases no such amount would suffice. It was Beard's point, however, that even a small holding might well create sympathy with the needs of public creditors. The question was not, he wrote, "how many hundred thousand dollars accrued to them," but whether they represented "distinct groups whose economic interest they understood and felt in concrete, definite form through their own personal experience with identical property rights." Furthermore the stake of the delegates was by no means as small as McDonald implies. No argument can conceal the fact that nearly half of the delegates made over $500 each from the

[5] The distribution of the debt and its great political significance are examined in detail by E. James Ferguson in a book soon to be published. He has kindly made available the results of his research.

appreciation of these certificates, and no fewer than thirteen held $5,000 worth apiece (face value) in 1787. It would certainly seem that once again Beard is closer to the mark than McDonald.[6]

In addition to this effort to reinterpret the nature of the Convention, McDonald tries to disprove Beard's contention concerning the alignment for and against ratification—"to test," as he puts it, "the validity of Beard's class struggle interpretation," by demonstrating through a description of the members of the ratifying conventions that men on both sides had the same economic interests and the same amount of property. In his anxiety to prove his point, McDonald sometimes (1) minimizes the property held by Federalists and exaggerates that owned by Antifederalists; (2) defines, in ways open to question, the professions of men on both sides so as to make it appear that they were of similar status; (3) omits, doubtless inadvertently, some relevant biographical data; (4) prints summary tables which appear to support his views, but neglects to publish tables which might have proved the contrary; and lastly (5) includes those facts which support his opinions but overlooks some which do not. The reader is drawn into an uncritical acceptance of all this because McDonald has done some excellent research and goes into great detail upon subjects which uphold his interpretation.

The first chapter of the three (chapters five, six, and seven) devoted to this subject is the least liable to objection. Most of the states discussed did not contain a large Antifederal party, and so, few challenging comparisons are made. There are, however, some doubtful generalizations,[7] and the discussion of the Connecticut ratifying convention introduces the line of argument which McDonald follows throughout. It is emphasized that the

[6] There are other interpretations in these chapters which might be challenged. The author is eager to note whenever a delegate voted for paper money or on behalf of debtors, ignoring any contrary behavior. The reader is usually not informed of the circumstances, which perhaps were not always known to McDonald. Langdon's vote for paper money was actually cast in behalf of a measure which was favored by many creditors as an alternative to something worse: a paper money plan so conservative that it was negatived by all of the soft money towns. Moreover Langdon spoke out strongly against state issues of paper money. See Richard B. Morris, "Insurrection in Massachusetts," in *America in Crisis,* ed. Daniel Aaron (New York, 1952), p. 48. The quote from Beard is from *An Economic Interpretation,* p. 73.

[7] McDonald theorizes that the states which were weak supported, and those which were strong opposed, the Constitution. There may be some validity to this, although an attempt to prove it universally true forces the author to insist, against much contrary evidence, that Connecticut and Maryland were weak whereas Rhode Island and New Hampshire were strong.

wealthy Federalist merchant Jeremiah Wadsworth had to give up some of his tax-delinquent land, and this is evidently supposed to cast doubt upon his financial position. Nearly everyone, rich or poor, was affected by the financial difficulties of the period. The question therefore is not who was in financial straits at the time—everybody was—but whether Federalists or Antifederalists had more property. In this case the fact of greatest significance is that Wadsworth was the richest man in the state. In the ratifying convention, we are told, both sides came from "similar economic backgrounds" in spite of the fact that twenty-nine out of thirty-three lawyers and ten out of twelve merchants were Federalists. The admission that among Antifederalists "less than half as many were public security holders" turns out to be McDonald's way of expressing the fact that forty-five Federalists and only six Antifederalists held part of the national debt.

Chapter six will furnish most of the examples of the way in which the true situation is disguised. The treatment of the alignment in Pennsylvania is typical. Property held by the Federalists is minimized. Robert Coleman is listed merely as the "proprietor of an ironworks"; one would not guess that this was the Elizabeth Furnace, which covered part of a 4,000-acre property, and that Coleman was one of the wealthy men of the state.[8] Less than justice is done to the holdings of such men as Yeates and Rush, while Neville and Scott certainly cannot be characterized merely as frontier farmers, for both were men of means, economic leaders of their community.[9] Colonel Thomas Bull, whom McDonald calls a farmer, managed an iron furnace so successfully that he was able to erect a fine mansion, a gristmill, a sawmill, and a blacksmith shop, and to retire.[10] On the other hand, among the Antifederalists, Nicholas Lotz, who was a weaver, becomes "the proprietor of a clothing business." Adam Orth is

[8] *The Pennsylvania Archives,* ed. Samuel Hazard et al. (Philadelphia and Harrisburg, 1852—), 3d Ser., XVII, 851; William H. Egle, "The Federal Constitution of 1787. Sketches of the Members of the Pennsylvania Convention," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography,* XI (1887), 71-72; *Forges and Furnaces in the Province of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1914), pp. 86-132. McDonald is to be admired for his courage in publishing all of this data, which lays him open to sniping at minor errors. The objection here is to some errors that are not minor because they prejudice the result.

[9] Russell J. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics* (Pittsburgh, 1938), passim.

[10] J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1881), pp. 489-490. McDonald here contradicts Beard, but it is Beard who is correct. The county histories, not used by McDonald, contain much information on these men.

called an iron manufacturer although he did not own a forge until 1793.[11] James Martin is stated to have been engaged in "miscellaneous promotional and speculative deals" elevating him above the farmer rank, but these high-sounding phrases mean, upon examination, only that he owned a couple of small farms and some public securities. Federalists such as Barclay, Neville, and Scott, who outdealt Martin by a wide margin, remain merely "farmers." Summarizing his information in a table, McDonald introduces an occupation called "manufacturing capitalist," which turns out to mean someone who had a mill, the idea evidently being that these small property holders should be considered among the economic elite. Six Federalists and seven Antifederalists are placed in this category, which makes it appear that, if anything, the Antifederalists were more likely to be "capitalists." But the fact is that six additional Federalists, identified only as farmers, also had mills (Allison, Bull, Hannum, J. Morris, Wynkoop, and Yardley).[12] In addition, if the Antifederalist Whitehill is elevated out of the farmer ranks because he owned an inn, the same ought to apply to the Federalist Barclay.[13] The total result is that McDonald's summary table is misleading, for whereas it states that 35 per cent of the Federal ratifiers were farmers, the true figure, accepting his definition of what constituted a farmer, is 15 per cent.

McDonald also tries to demonstrate that the Antifederalists held more public securities than their opponents by comparing the certificates held by the delegates. The fact that a few of the important Antifederalists owned certificates really proves little. Popular parties typically derive their leadership from men of large property, and in nearly every state, including Pennsylvania, the Antifederalists were led by men of means. A few of them were indeed large holders,[14] but the evidence is strong that most of the securities were owned by Federalists. Philadelphians owned as much as 90 per cent of the debt, and Philadelphians of all professions and classes were Federal; pro-Constitution candidates to the ratifying con-

[11] Egle, *Forges and Furnaces,* p. 135.

[12] Citations to *The Pennsylvania Archives* given by McDonald, and add, for Morris, *ibid.,* 3d Ser., XVI, 726.

[13] B. F. Fackenthal, Jr., "John Barclay," *The Bucks County Historical Society Papers,* VIII (Doylestown, Pa., 1940), 9-18.

[14] Among the men mentioned by McDonald (p. 169), William Will was supported by both sides, and was a Federal candidate for the Assembly in 1787. Robert L. Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790* (Harrisburg, 1942), p. 336. It was James Irvine, not William Irvine, who was defeated in 1787.

vention received an average of 1,200 votes each compared with 160 each for the Antifederalists.[15] Among the largest ($10,000 plus) holders whose political affiliations could be determined, three out of five were Federalists.[16]

Finally (and this is the most important point of all), whereas only two or three Antifederal delegates were men of large property, more than a dozen of their opponents were wealthy. In short the delegates on both sides did not hold "about the same amounts of the same kinds of property." Again Beard is more nearly correct than McDonald.

A similar procedure is followed in the case of Massachusetts. Federalists are downgraded and their property minimized. Elijah Dwight was more than a retail shopkeeper; he was a prominent and wealthy judge.[17] Ebenezer Janes, who is called a maker of gravestones, was also a miller and a deacon who had an imposing house.[18] T. J. Skinner, "carpenter," was a prominent Williamstown merchant.[19] John Ashley, identified by McDonald merely as a farmer, was a merchant, a lawyer, and a large landowner (and Harvard, 1754).[20] Noah Porter, also called a farmer, had the first chair in town, later added a chaise, had £100 loaned at interest, was Harvard 1761, and was sheriff of Hampshire County.[21] Tristam Dalton was not just a lawyer but a wealthy merchant who married the daughter of another wealthy merchant. Morison writes that when Dalton went to New York as one of Massachusetts' first senators, he drove "in

[15] McDonald argues that this vote represented the decision of mechanics, artisans, and tradesmen, but clearly the merchants had voted the same way. Contemporary testimony is unanimous on this point. For example, David Redick to William Irvine, Sept. 24, 1787, Irvine Papers, Vol. IX, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; statement of George Bryan, Bryan Papers, *ibid.*

[16] E. James Ferguson kindly made available his extensive material on the Federal debt.

[17] F. A. Hosmer, "Town of Great Barrington," Berkshire Historical and Scientific Society, *Collections,* II (1899), 1-60; Henry W. Taft, "Judicial History of Berkshire," *ibid.,* I (1892), 107.

[18] Herbert Collins Parsons, *A Puritan Outpost. A History of the Town and People of Northfield, Massachusetts* (New York, 1937), p. 189; Josiah H. Temple and George Sheldon, *A History of the Town of Northfield, Massachusetts, . . .* (Albany, 1875), p. 319.

[19] Arthur L. Perry, *Williamstown and Williams College* (Norwood, Mass., 1899), pp. 82, 162-163, 277; Benjamin F. Mills, "Town of Williamstown," Berk. Hist. Soc., *Colls.,* II, 673.

[20] Taft, "Judicial History," p. 112.

[21] Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley* (Springfield, Mass., 1905), pp. 383, 386, and in the genealogical section, p. 114.

Newburyport style, in his own four-horse coach, emblazoned with the Dalton arms, and attended by servants in the Dalton livery."[22] Other examples could be given.[23] Among the Federalists whom McDonald could not identify, George Payson of Walpole and Moses Richardson of Medway were both innkeepers,[24] while John Winthrop and Caleb Davis were both prominent merchants of Boston.[25] On the Antifederal side there are also some errors in the assigning of occupations.[26]

An important question of interpretation concerns the category of "gentleman-capitalists," who were "men of means, large landowners, renters, money-lenders, and investors in various local business ventures." Among the thirteen Federalists identified as such, many undoubtedly belong to this group, among them Francis Dana, Benjamin Greenleaf (who was from Newburyport, incidentally, not Salem), Nathaniel Barrell, Benjamin Lincoln, William Pynchon, William Heath, and Richard Cranch. Whether all or even any of the fifteen Antifederalists are properly assigned to this category is of course a matter of judgment, but it is clear from the records that they did not as a group compare in wealth with their Federal equivalents.[27]

[22] John J. Currier, *"Ould Newbury"; Historical and Biographical Sketches* (Boston, 1896), pp. 477-482; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1783-1860* (Boston, 1921), pp. 164-165.

[23] Noah Goodman owned a sawmill as well as an inn. Judd, *Hadley*, p. 385. Joseph Hosmer, "carpenter," was a Senator from 1785-1793, became a Major, and was referred to as Esquire. Lemuel Shattuck, *A History of the Town of Concord, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, . . .* (Boston, 1835), pp. 236, 376. Joseph Titcomb was a merchant. John J. Currier, *History of Newburyport, Mass., 1764-1905* (Newburyport, 1906, 1909), I, 637, II, 102-103*n*. Isaac Snow was not a farmer but a shipowner. George Augustus Wheeler and Henry Warren Wheeler, *History of Brunswick, Topsham, and Harpswell, Maine* (Boston, 1878), p. 886.

[24] Isaac Newton Lewis, *A History of Walpole, Mass. from Earliest Times . . .* (Norwood, Mass., 1905), p. 126; E. O. Jameson, *The History of Medway, Mass. 1713-1885* (Millis, Mass., 1886), p. 515.

[25] The Caleb Davis Papers, in the Massachusetts Historical Society, are extensive and important.

[26] T. Fuller was a merchant and J. Webber was an innkeeper. Among the unknowns can be added four farmers (Collins, Stebbins, Hathaway, and Harrington), a doctor (Hulburt), an innkeeper (Cooley), a lawyer (Stone), and a Baptist minister (Tingley). In general the research into local materials is not nearly so thorough as the footnotes imply, here and elsewhere.

[27] As to a few of these: Daniel Adams, on the pages cited, bought two house lots, was born, married, had children (one of whom held many town offices), and died. On a page not cited he "accumulated a large property." Consider Arms and Benjamin Eastman were both early settlers who acquired large estates, evidently in land. Moses Ames, on the pages cited, arrived, had one of sixty-four rights, became post-

McDonald's summary table and his conclusions, being based in part upon doubtful facts, can be seriously challenged. If the changes in occupation noted above are made, it appears that thirty merchants and tradesmen favored ratification and only eight opposed it. At the other end of the social scale most of the men whose occupations are unknown may safely be presumed to have been farmers, and if they are added to those known to have been such, then 38 per cent of the Federalists and 58 per cent of the Antifederalists were farmers. Therefore, despite McDonald, the Federalists were not more successful in winning the support of these men. McDonald omits any mention of the relative property holdings of the opposing sides, but it is certainly important to observe that almost all of the wealthy men in the convention were Federal. He does concede that the vast majority of public security holders favored ratification. His figures (in assembling which he has done a real service) show, indeed, that only three Antifederalists held $500 worth whereas forty-one Federalists did so. Outside of the convention, virtually all of the securities were concentrated in Boston and a few other seacoast centers; most of the large owners were merchants and, insofar as their politics are known, they were Federalists.

South Carolina is discussed without providing the usual table summarizing the alignment. Had such a table been constructed it might have caused McDonald to modify his conclusions. Two key generalizations are offered. First, "The majorities by which merchants, factors, lawyers, planters, and farmers favored ratification was for each group about the same as the overall majority in the convention—about two to one." Let us accept the data given, but among the Federalists changing John Chesnut and Henry Laurens from planters to merchants and John Kean from unknown to merchant.[28] The proportions are as follows: merchants, 3:1 for ratification; among artisans and mechanics, 7:1, lawyers 5:1, doctors 5:1, and large planters 3:1, but in significant contrast small planters and farmers 2:1 *against* ratification. The truth therefore is diametrically

master in 1798, and for an unspecified time owned a slave worth a yoke of oxen. David Harwood does not appear on the page cited, but elsewhere in the same book he is identified as a small farmer. Some of these were men of above average means, but to call them "gentleman-capitalists" of the same ilk as the Federalists is certainly questionable.

[28] Thomas J. Kirkland and Robert M. Kennedy, *Historic Camden* (Columbia, 1905-1926), I, 366-367; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1927*, 69th Congress, Second Session, House Document no. 783 (Washington, 1928), p. 1168.

opposed to his statement. Secondly, he continues, "They had, proportionately, about the same amounts of the same kinds of property." Let us construct our own table of slaveownership, since none is furnished:

	Federalists	*Antifederalists*
unknown	18	8
none	2	2
1–9	16	21
10–19	25	14
20–49	23	13
50–99	30	12
100 plus	35	3

It will be seen that 43.6 per cent of the Federalists and only 20.5 per cent of the Antifederalists owned fifty slaves.[29] So also the very great majority of large landholders and of large public security holders were Federalists. Once again McDonald's conclusions are contrary to the evidence.

Chapter six closes with a discussion of the ratification in New Hampshire. The shortage of biographical information prevents any confident generalizations. McDonald concedes that public securities were held mainly by the Federalists. All of the merchants in the convention were Federalists; 60 per cent of the Antifederalists and 53 per cent of the Federalists were farmers or of unknown occupation. No summation is made of the proportion of large property holders on either side, although such information as is provided makes it obvious that the Federalists had far more wealth, a conclusion which contemporaries shared.

To summarize the critique of this key chapter, the true situation is as follows: in all four of these states, among members of the conventions, (1) merchants and those connected with the commercial interest favored ratification by an overwhelming margin, (2) farmers took the opposite side, (3) public security holders were predominantly Federal, (4) the Federalists had far more property. This is precisely what Beard argued, yet McDonald, through the omission of pertinent data and the distortion, doubtless unconscious, of the facts he does give, arrives at an opposite conclusion.

The analysis which has been presented here could be extended through the third chapter on ratification, but enough has perhaps been said to prove the points at issue. A few additional remarks may be made. In Virginia, the delegates held properties in counties other than those which

[29] Most of the eighteen Federalists whose property in slaves is unknown lived in the eastern part of the state and probably were slaveowners.

they represented, and these are not always noted—twenty-five Federalists and seventeen Antifederalists had more property than is shown. Some errors are made in regard to the professions of the delegates: among the Federalists, Simms, Z. Johnston, and Tomlin were merchants;[30] T. Lewis, McClerry, and Bushrod Washington were lawyers;[31] while Antifederalists R. Williams and R. Lawson were also lawyers.[32] Federal delegates did have more slaves than the Antifederalists, and more of them were large public security holders, but it is true that the division of property among the delegates in the Virginia convention was more equal than was ordinarily the case. McDonald's concluding generalizations, as elsewhere, do not always follow from the evidence. The discussion of New York's ratification also contains some errors. His description of the convention delegates omits altogether the wealthy Federalist lawyer Richard Morris,[33] while Philip Livingston was a merchant in addition to his other occupations.[34] The impression is given that Federalist John Hobart was merely a debtor, but in fact he inherited a considerable estate.[35] As usual the conclusion is drawn that the members were about equal in wealth and economic interest. No table is provided, so it is necessary to construct one:

	Federal	*elected Anti, voted Fed.*	*elected Anti, did not vote*	*Antifederal*
merchants	5	1	0	0
lawyers and large landowners	3	3	0	1
lawyers	5	0	4	7
large landowners	2	1	1	2
millers	0	1	0	1
obscure men	4	3	2	9
farmers	0	3	0	6

[30] Robert A. East, *Business Enterprise in the American Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1938), p. 172; Freeman H. Hart, *The Valley of Virginia in the American Revolution 1763-1789* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1942), p. 150; the *Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser* (Richmond), May 27, 1785.

[31] Hugh Blair Grigsby, *The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788* (Richmond, 1890-91), II, 20; Samuel T. Wiley, *History of Monongalia County, West Virginia . . .* (Kingwood, W. Va., 1883), p. 311; Alvin T. Embrey, *History of Fredericksburg Virginia* (Richmond, 1937), p. 156.

[32] Maud Carter Clement, *The History of Pittsylvania County Virginia* (Lynchburg, 1929), p. 139*n*; the *Virginia Gazette, or, the American Advertiser,* February 7, 1784.

[33] See John A. Krout in *DAB* s.v. "Morris, Richard."

[34] East, *Business Enterprise,* p. 190.

[35] See Charles Worthen Spencer in *DAB* s.v. "Hobart, John Sloss."

Obviously there was no such equality. It should also be noted that on the final alignment eleven Federalists and six Antifederalists held public securities worth over $500.

The last three chapters consider the economic origins of the Constitution from a more general point of view, and some more general criticisms are in order. In the first place, it can be seen from the foregoing that the attack upon Beard has been unsuccessful. The Federal Convention did not represent all or even most of the economic interests and political opinions. Analysis of the delegates to the ratifying conventions shows conclusively that the influence of the merchants, lawyers, and large landowners was pro-Constitution while most farmers were on the other side; that the Federalists held far more wealth than their opponents; and that the influence of public security holders was strongly on the side of ratification. The evidence upon which the final interpretative chapters is based therefore lacks validity and the conclusions themselves are of course invalid.

A second general criticism concerns the introductory paragraphs which precede the descriptions of the delegates in each state. These are designed to analyze some of the local factors which were involved in the ratification process. In some cases McDonald has uncovered new material, and parts of his introductions are very good, but they usually deal with only a few of the causative factors. Those which do not support his general thesis are omitted, although the reader is sometimes left with a different impression. Particular attention is given to the state paper money controversy, in discussing which McDonald tries to show that the Federalists were more deeply in debt than the Antifederalists and that they supported debtor bills. Several observations must be made here. The first is that by selecting particular votes and ignoring others, the evidence is "stacked." In the case of South Carolina, for example, all of the attention is concentrated on the debates in 1785. Yet it is conceded that two years later the planters had changed their minds (indeed the situation in 1785 was abnormal, not typical). It would seem pertinent therefore to examine a series of votes recorded on economic matters during 1787-88, in which the sectional division, correlating with the vote on the Constitution, is revealed. Secondly, the fact that men borrowed money, as did the South Carolina planters, does not make them debtors in the Beardian sense. The difference between the man of means, who borrows of his free will, or to avoid disposing of some of his less fluid wealth (as Washington borrowed £10,000), and the small property holder, who unwillingly falls into debt, or is forced to

borrow from one creditor in order to pay another, is fundamental; and to treat them alike is as absurd as it would be to condemn United States Steel because its indebtedness is greater than that of a corner filling station. Thirdly, McDonald's anxiety to prove that Federalists were debtors leads him into some misstatements. We are informed for example that "virtually all of the fourteen delegates" from the Shenandoah Valley were debtors, but according to his source[36] only five were in debt. Fourthly, in spite of what McDonald says, paper money advocates did tend to oppose the Constitution: (1) most of the Antifederal strength in Connecticut came from paper money districts, (2) the correlation in Massachusetts exceeds 80 per cent, (3) the correlation in New Hampshire is not high, but it exists, (4) the paper money forces in Rhode Island were Antifederal, (5) the alignment in New York is well known, (6) the correlation in North Carolina is very high (the situation there is not described by McDonald), and (7) paper money supporters in both Maryland and Virginia usually opposed ratification. There are certainly many cases in which the generalization does *not* hold, but it cannot be denied altogether. To do so, finally, is also to ignore a great deal of contemporary testimony. If the debtors did not, on the whole, oppose, and the creditors did not, by and large, support the Constitution, it would come as a great surprise to informed observers on both sides.[37]

Another general critical observation stems from what is in many ways an excellent suggestion: namely, that the economic aspects of the Constitution be studied by classifying Americans in terms of their occupations, of which McDonald distinguishes four major categories and over two dozen subgroups. Beyond doubt this kind of an investigation is needed and will be most rewarding. However, American society in 1787-88 can be structured in other ways than by occupation, of which one of the most important is by class, or (if the existence of classes be denied) at least by relative income or property held. It is not sufficient to distinguish, for example, between the occupations of subsistence farmers and merchants unless it is recognized also that the former were poor by comparison with the latter. Despite McDonald, it can be maintained that the Constitution was written by large property owners and that the division over its ac-

[36] Hart, *Valley of Virginia,* pp. 123, 132.

[37] Incidentally it should be added that if, as McDonald maintains, the Constitution did not prevent the states from issuing paper, makers and opponents alike thought that it did.

ceptance followed, to some extent, class lines. There is much evidence that this was the case, and the thesis is stated explicitly in many contemporary letters and newspaper articles. At the very least the subject warrants investigation, and no program for research can be successful which ignores it.

A final point: the procedure adopted by McDonald and others of conducting their research with the intent of disproving someone's thesis is not likely to reveal the truth, because one's conclusions are prejudiced in advance. The facts of history do not, as a rule, all point inescapably in a single direction; interpretations are made by balancing the evidence. When one sets out deliberately to gather evidence on only one side the desired result can generally be achieved, for along the way first the "facts" and then the judgment are unconsciously distorted. McDonald has done much valuable research, and his errors are doubtless honest errors; yet no better example can be found of the pitfalls inherent in this methodology. (Beard, of course, can be criticized on the same basis, but this does not justify the method.) The full story of the Constitution and its ratification remains to be written. Until this is done, the historian seeking an interim interpretation will be better advised to follow Beard than McDonald.

FORREST McDONALD'S REBUTTAL

It is with some reluctance that I undertake a reply to Jackson T. Main's critique of *We the People,* for with much of what Mr. Main says I entirely agree. Like him, I have been distressed by the absence of critical reviews of the book (I have seen only two, and he wrote both).[1] Like him, I have been surprised that an attempt to correct some of the errors, misinterpretations, and overemphases in Charles A. Beard's pioneering work (by no means an attempt "utterly to refute" it) has, in Mr. Main's words, "aroused scarcely a whimper of protest." Furthermore, Mr. Main has, in some instances, correctly pointed out some of my factual errors, though he has missed others that I have discovered since publication. The book, it should be said, is based upon several thousand scraps of miscellaneous information, most of it obscure and much of it drawn from sources that were not written with the most scrupulous accuracy, and though I triple-

[1] Mr. Main's first review appeared in *The Nation,* June 13, 1959, pp. 538-539.

checked each statement of fact some errors were inevitable. Thus where Mr. Main himself has been accurate (which is not always), I gratefully accept the correction.

With other parts of his review, however, I am less happy. Though I feel that chapter two—on factions and areas represented in the Philadelphia Convention to which Mr. Main devotes approximately one-fifth of his paper—is the weakest part of the book, as well as not being entirely germane, Mr. Main's undocumented comments about it seem to me as naïve as they are inaccurate. Most of his observations here concern Massachusetts. My analysis of that state was based upon the tabulation and mapping of every vote, popular and legislative, cast on state-wide issues from 1781 to 1790, and upon an intensive study of the patterns of internal trade and transportation. And, until he or someone else goes through this material, I shall prefer to believe what I have derived from my research rather than his bare assertion that I am wrong.

Similarly, I am unhappy with Mr. Main's practice of building logical conclusions upon self-contradictory assumptions, and changing his assumptions to suit his convenience. For example, consider the matter of how property holding is supposed to have influenced attitudes toward the Constitution. At the outset he approves Beard's assertion that the line of division for and against the Constitution was between substantial personalty interests on the one hand and real property interests (particularly small farmers) and debtors on the other. However, Mr. Main omits Beard's explicit qualification that what was meant was personalty *other than slaves*. Later, he goes on to construct a new definition of division that entirely abandons Beard's fundamental distinction between personalty and realty. To Mr. Main the fight becomes one between rich guys and poor guys. And even as he shifts the main argument, Mr. Main finds it convenient to change assumptions frequently. At one point he is with Beard on the proposition that it is not so much the *amount* of public security or other personalty holdings that counts; rather, what "really" matters is merely having had experience with various kinds of property, as a result of which "even a small holding might well create sympathy" with the needs of suffering public creditors or other personalty groups. Two paragraphs later he changes his mind and decides that what is really important is neither who was suffering nor who had experience with different kinds of property, "but whether Federalists or Antifederalists had more property." As this bewildering display of illogic proceeds, it is difficult for me

to understand just what thesis Mr. Main is defending. It is certainly not Charles A. Beard's thesis.

But let us get down to specifics. Mr. Main's first volley, after his critique of my second chapter, is directed against my account of the economic interests of the members of the Philadelphia Convention. He begins with a reluctant admission that my sketches contain "much additional data." But he then forgets this and compares my analysis of the delegates with Beard's, as if we were merely placing different emphasis (mine a distorted emphasis) upon precisely the same data. To substantiate his charge, he mentions by name thirteen of the delegates, and asserts that I attempted to depreciate their property holdings. He made an unfortunate choice. If the reader will compare my statements with Beard's on these thirteen delegates, he will find that I have shown at least eight of them to have had considerably *more* property than Beard had indicated. I found and reported that all four delegates from South Carolina had far more property than Beard had stated: Butler had 112 more slaves than Beard had said (about this, more later); Beard credited Rutledge with only 26 slaves, whereas I show the number to have been 243; Beard records Charles Pinckney as holding 52 slaves, which I corrected to 111, and C. C. Pinckney as holding only 45 slaves, which I revised upward to 70. In addition, I found and reported considerable personal property holdings, overlooked by Beard, in the cases of Houstoun, Wilson, Ingersoll, and Randolph. Yet it is in precisely these cases that Main charges me with twisting Beard's data so as to depreciate the property holdings of the delegates. To quote a phrase used by Mr. Main, "This is absurd." But if he had chosen a different set of delegates, or considered them all, the result would have been the same, since for a vast majority of the delegates I found and reported more property than did Beard.

As to the use of adjectives to disparage property holdings, Mr. Main makes great sport over my characterizing Edmund Randolph as in "great need," "beset with economic difficulties," and, in Mr. Main's words, "impoverished it seems by thousands of acres and over a hundred slaves." Main neglects to tell us that Beard himself described Randolph as a man "burdened with debt," "apparently never very prosperous," and one whose slaves "had long been an incumbrance."[2]

My aim was not to depreciate but to clarify and fill in the details,

[2] Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York, 1913), p. 139.

details which were, in the main, unavailable when Beard wrote his book. To illustrate, let us consider the case of Pierce Butler, one of Mr. Main's thirteen. Beard described Butler as a plantation aristocrat;[3] so do I (pp. 81-82). But because of the paucity of available manuscripts when he wrote, Beard was able to add only two items of factual information, both of which happened to be wrong. He lists Butler as owning only thirty-one slaves. I corrected this, revising Beard upward, not downward, and showed that Butler owned 143 slaves. But then I went on to add more precise data about Butler's economic affairs during the years 1783-87. Butler was financially embarrassed. Just after the war he had negotiated a large loan in Holland on the security of his very large plantation, but then misfortune overtook him. He suffered a succession of crop failures and it was not until the crop of 1787, harvested and marketed some months after the Convention, that he began to pay off his postponed obligations. From 1785 to 1787 he was rich but a debtor—a debtor, unable to pay his debts—and during 1785 and 1786 his perilous circumstances led him to vote for an issue of paper money, for the Pine Barren Act, and for various other emergency measures for the relief of debtors. Beard's polarization of his data in this instance was, in my opinion, justifiable and probably unavoidable. Mr. Main's effort to re-polarize is neither.

As to the problems that confront a debtor, Mr. Main is extremely confused.[4] The seriousness or safety of a debtor's situation do not depend upon the amount of his debt or of his other property, but upon whether he is in a position to pay when debts fall due.[5] Mr. Main's distinction between "the man of means, who borrows of his own free will, or to avoid disposing of some of his less fluid wealth, and the small property holder, who

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

[4] In his review in *The Nation,* Mr. Main said, in effect, that what counts is not debts but assets. Apparently he thought the matter over between the two pieces and realized what his corner grocer could have told him: that it is neither of these, but the net difference between assets and liabilities, that is the criterion of the economic worth of a man or a company. But apparently he did not give the matter much further thought.

[5] The classic example is seen in the collapse of the so-called Insull Empire in 1932. Middle West Utilities, the Insulls' major holding company, controlled well over a billion dollars of property, and its debts were nowhere near that figure, but it went into bankruptcy because it was unable, at the critical moment in the summer of 1932, to meet a ten million dollar note maturity. Mr. Main might gain some understanding of the economics of the subject on which he writes if he were to study the problems that American business has faced during various periods of financial stringency.

unwillingly falls into debt, or is forced to borrow from one creditor in order to pay another," is not, as he asserts, "fundamental." It is merely inaccurate. Some of the largest debtors of all are precisely described by his statement about the "small property holder," and many of the small property holders borrowed of their own free will to avoid selling their farms or other holdings. Bray Hammond settled this myth of the poor debtor in his work published two years ago, and if Mr. Main has not read Hammond's work, he should.[6]

Before passing on to the next section of Mr. Main's effort, one might observe that regarding the Philadelphia Convention, Main neglects to mention that in my summary I drew the extremely reserved conclusion that Beard's analysis merely requires "a large number of qualifications." He also neglects to mention that I state (p. 95) that, though the value of the agricultural holdings of the delegates far outweighed their personalty, delegates having personalty interests outnumbered delegates having primarily realty interests thirty-one to twenty-four. He also neglects to consider my fourth chapter, in which it is rather conclusively demonstrated, I believe, that there was virtually no correlation between economic interests and voting behavior in the Convention. One would suspect that Mr. Main is attacking one book and defending another without having read either.

The rest of Mr. Main's efforts are devoted to my chapters on ratification. He begins with another demonstration that he has apparently not read my book. My description of Jeremiah Wadsworth's condition, Main speculates, "is evidently supposed to cast doubt upon his financial position." To anyone who can comprehend the English language, the passage in question, if read in context (pp. 138-140), is a description of Connecticut's economic problems during the Confederation period, pointing out why Connecticut had abundant economic reasons for supporting the Constitution. It forms the primary basis for my conclusion that, with only minor modifications (particularly that the majority of Connecticut's farmers apparently favored ratification), Beard's thesis is applicable in the case of Connecticut.[7]

[6] Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America, from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957).

[7] At the close of this paragraph Mr. Main justifiably takes me to task for saying that among anti-Federalists in Connecticut "less than half as many were public security holders." I should have said that the percentage of anti-Federalists who held securities was less than half that among the Federalists (the percentages were 15

Otherwise Mr. Main focuses upon my chapter six, concerning ratification in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and New Hampshire. As to Massachusetts, I see no point in quibbling, for Mr. Main's efforts are again beside the point. If he will read the "Significance of the Data" chapters which he dismisses without a hearing, he will learn that in chapters eight and ten I conclude that for Massachusetts, as for Connecticut—but only for these two states—Beard's thesis is fundamentally sound, though it can be clarified in numerous details.

As to Pennsylvania, rather than argue with Mr. Main's corrections, and point out where he is often, though sometimes subtly, mistaken, let us suppose that he is correct in every detail. If one applies Mr. Main's suggested corrections to my summary table regarding the Pennsylvania delegates (p. 181), one learns that the Federalists and anti-Federalists were economically even more nearly equal than I had indicated! That is, in every respect except public security holdings, which Beard regarded as the superdynamic element in the ratification. Nothing Main has said is designed to, or could, alter the facts (a) that 73.9 per cent of the anti-Federalists in the Pennsylvania ratifying convention held securities, as against 50 per cent of the Federalists; (b) that the average and mean holdings of the anti-Federalists were far greater than those of the Federalists; and (c) that the twenty-three anti-Federalists in the convention held, between them, securities of a face value greater than those of the forty-six Federalists combined.

In his comments regarding South Carolina, Mr. Main demonstrates that he is no better at arithmetic than he is at reading. First he corrects my lists of merchants, adding Chesnut, Laurens, and Kean as Federalist merchants. Since I do not have available the source he cites for Chesnut, I accept that correction for present purposes. Regarding Laurens, however, Mr. Main is some years out of date, for Laurens had definitely retired from mercantile activity before 1788. As to Kean (whom Main mistakenly says he is transferring from the "unknown" classification, whereas actually I have classified him as a planter), it depends upon the Kean we are talking about. John Kean, merchant (obviously the one to whom Main refers,

and 35.1, respectively). Upon checking I find that this is what I did say in my first draft, but the important distinction was edited out somewhere along the way, probably because the phraseology in the original was so awkward. The phrasing as it appears in the book distorts the meaning. In another part of the book I did a similar thing, with the result that I said "direct" instead of "inverse" in describing the ratio of one thing to another.

since he cites the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress* as his source), was born and lived in Charleston; he died in 1795. The other John Kean, a planter (and obviously a different person, since the tax records for St. Helena's Parish indicate that he was alive in 1798), was the one to whom I referred, and he lived in St. Helena's Parish. I assumed that the latter was the delegate to the ratifying convention, since the delegate represented St. Helena's, not Charleston. I may be wrong, but I have seen no evidence demonstrating it. This means that we add 1 merchant, not 3, to the Federalist ranks, and that at best Mr. Main may be 33⅓ per cent accurate, roughly the extent to which he is accurate throughout. But even if he were right in asserting that 3 should be added, that would bring the total number of Federalist merchants to 9, as opposed to 4 anti-Federalist merchants. Nine to four, according to Mr. Main's system of reckoning, is equivalent to 3 to 1.[8] Similarly, from his own table, constructed from my data, he concludes that small planters and farmers in South Carolina opposed the Constitution, 2 to 1. He does not define small planters and farmers. If this means those owning less than 10 slaves, the number (according to Mr. Main's table) is 23 anti-Federalists to 18 Federalists. Twenty-three to eighteen is, according to Mr. Main's system of reckoning, equivalent to 2 to 1. If he means those owning 19 slaves or less, the number (according to Mr. Main's table) is 37 anti-Federalists to 43 Federalists. Thirty-seven, according to Mr. Main's system of reckoning, is twice as many as 43. Similarly, regarding the artisans and mechanics in the convention, all 7 of whom were Federalists, 7 to 0 is, according to Mr. Main's system of reckoning, equivalent to 7 to 1. Finally, having arrived at these various ratios by a method unknown to ordinary mortals, Mr. Main is ready for comparisons. To disprove my statement regarding (1) merchants, (2) factors, (3) lawyers, (4) planters, and (5) farmers, Main compares his own ratios for (1) merchants, (2) artisans and mechanics, (3) lawyers, (4) doctors, (5) large planters, and (6) small planters. He thus places his logic on a footing with his arithmetic.

In summarizing South Carolina Mr. Main overlooks two small details: that 68.5 per cent of the anti-Federalists held securities, as against

[8] If he will refigure, he will find that his corrections, had they been valid, would have given the Federalists 69 per cent of the merchants. Since they had 67 per cent of the total vote, Main's revisions would actually make my statement more accurate than it is.

41.6 per cent of the Federalists; and that 26.8 per cent of the Federalists had borrowed state paper money, whereas only 10.9 per cent of the anti-Federalists had borrowed paper money. Please let us remember that Beard maintained that it was personalty other than slaves, and particularly public securities, that was the dynamic element in the ratification, and that it was friends of paper money who furnished the principal leadership against ratification.

Next Mr. Main takes up New Hampshire. Except for the snide aside that I "concede" that public securities were held mainly by Federalists (as a matter of fact I "conceded" nothing throughout; I merely reported the facts as I found them), Main has nothing to argue about here. He does neglect to mention, however, that only 7 of the 104 voting delegates in the convention, 6 of them Federalists, held any securities at all. The interesting thing about Main's paragraph on New Hampshire is that he states that more than half (53 per cent) of the Federalists were farmers, then tells us in the very next paragraph that he has just demonstrated that an overwhelming majority of the farmers in this and three other states opposed the Constitution. (This after having previously suggested changes in the Pennsylvania sketches that would still leave a majority of the farmers in that convention opposed to ratification, and after suggesting no changes whatever as to the numbers of farmers in the South Carolina convention.)

It is by similar reasoning Mr. Main draws the other three conclusions in this last paragraph about the chapter in question. For example, regarding securities: I reported that in Massachusetts, which had a large number of security holders, and in New Hampshire, which had a small number, security holders favored ratification. I also reported that in Pennsylvania and South Carolina, where there were large numbers of security holders, a far greater percentage of anti-Federalists than of Federalists held securities. Mr. Main says nothing even aimed at contradicting this information. But he summarizes what he has said by telling us that he has just shown that "public security holders were predominantly Federal." This paragraph is too ludicrous for description.

After this bit of nonsense, Mr. Main has little in the way of substantive comment, and certainly not enough to warrant further discussion here. Instead, let us consider the paper as a whole. Suppose we assume that even his most fanciful and maladroit claims were well founded; what would be the result? Main concedes that I was right, or close to it, in four of the five states considered in chapter five; he admits that in Vir-

ginia (per his own researches), despite my being guilty of making some miscellaneous factual errors, property was pretty evenly distributed between the contending sides; and finally, he allows North Carolina and Rhode Island to go entirely unchallenged. Even if we give Mr. Main New Hampshire, which he does not really claim, this means that Main concedes that Beard was wrong in at least seven of the thirteen states. It seems to me that even if I were as bad as Mr. Main makes out, it remains a certainty that Beard's thesis cannot hold up. After all, a general interpretation that is at best, and by admission of its staunchest defender, more than 50 per cent invalid is not the most universal truth imaginable. The essential point of my book was just that: Beard's fundamental error (not an uncommon one in our profession) lay in attempting to postulate a single, uniform system of interpretation for an event that was just too complex to admit of such.

Charles A. Beard made one great and lasting contribution to American historiography: he pointed out something that should have been obvious, that American political history has not taken place in a vacuum. To convey this simple truth to the diehards in his profession, Beard found it expedient to employ radical means. He polarized his data, almost to the point of suggesting that politics unfold according to mechanistic economic laws, calculable with a slide rule. The great irony is that many of his fellows and followers, lacking his imagination, failed to profit from his contribution because they took for Gospel the means by which he made it. My humble effort was directed at getting us back on the path. Apparently Mr. Main prefers the wilderness.